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**Skipping Memories on Partition and
the Intersensory Field in Subcontinental Britain**

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eds Natasha Eaton and Alice Correia

pre-proofread draft

Memory skips like a happy pebble... The pebble must skip. Otherwise we'd die a thousand deaths before we go through a single day.

(Shobha Rao, An Unrestored Woman, p 107, p 110).

People are hurt so much but they don't want to talk about it [partition]. They do not have the language. They can't articulate even how they felt at the time. And preconditioned – women are not allowed to talk, they sit and suffer. That is how it is still is for a lot of women. Sometimes their eyes well up even though they cannot talk about it. (Zara, East Sussex, 2016).

Likhne vale bahut hai. Parhne vale itne nahi.

(There are many who write. But not many who read.)

(Daljit, West Sussex, 2016).

The partition of the Indian subcontinent was not simply one event, but a series of events scaling from the macro- to the micro-. Political machinations, rumour, anxiety, forced displacement, looting, massacres, abductions and rape attended the division on the eastern and western sides of the subcontinent in 1947. Their psycho-political legacies continue to this day in the form of repressed memories and experiences, deep loss and regrets, animosity, and/or communalist resurrection, rage and rupture throughout the subcontinent and even among its diaspora. When conducting research for a play on partition called *Silent Sisters* among the British Asian diaspora in 2016, one comment that I came across on more than one occasion was ‘*Bahut lambhi-chaury kahani hai*’ meaning ‘It’s a very long [literally, long-wide] tale’.¹ The comment encapsulated the scale of the devastating events on peoples’ lives who are now mainly aged in their 70s and 80s, and the difficulties of coming to terms with them by those who went through the forced displacement. The long-wide description also conjured up how partition memories did not just stop on the shores of the subcontinent, but travelled far across the seas with South Asian migrants. With rare exception, this difficulty of self-expression has been evident for several decades after the momentous upheaval that accompanied the breaking and making of nation-states.

Literature, poetry and song has been relatively forthright in terms of partition reminiscences from the outset, with poignant reminders by the likes of Amrit Wilson and satirical sketches offered by Sadat Hasan Manto. In South Asian visual culture, however, reckoning with the horrors at the time was a fraught one, and in the years after partition, representations were expressed in elliptical forms such as through lost-and-found dynamics in popular cinema where family members were separated through force of circumstances, and oblique allegories in art films as with those directed by Ritwik Ghatak. In the 1970s, *Garam Hava* (*Scorching Winds*, directed by M S Sathya and Balraj Sahni, 1973) provided a

melancholic film on the events, and about a decade later, *Tamas* (*Darkness*, directed by Govind Nihlani, 1988) was screened on India's national Doordarshan television. From 1997, a spate of new films was created in league with the fiftieth year commemoration of the two nations. With the benefit of time's healing balm, one could talk about the emergence of a 'partition culture industry' where books were adapted for films as with *Train to Pakistan* (dir Pamela Rooks, 1997) and *Earth* (directed by Deepa Mehta, 1998), and new movies came to light such as *Shaheed-e-Mohabbat Boota Singh* (directed by Manoj Punj, 1999), *Khamosh Pani* (*Silent Water*, directed by Sabiha Sumar, 2003), *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag!* (*Run Milkha Run!* directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, 2013), and *Begum Jaan* (directed by Srijit Mukherji, 2017).

The blind spot noted by this volume's editors in national and transnational visual cultures on representing partition is even more relevant for the performance arts, not least for the fact that little evidence of such ephemeral expressions remains. After reading Urvashi Butalia's retrieval of oral histories among survivors in India and Pakistan in her book, *The Other Side of Silence*, I was inspired to explore some of the stories, memories and opinions that circulated among the British Asian diaspora. Later this impulse became the basis of a theatre script. Due to my familiarity with the Punjabi language I chose to base the story in the north west of India/Pakistan. The themes had obvious resonance for events along the eastern front in 1947 as well, a region that saw about three million refugees, about a quarter of the fourteen million or so displaced in the north-west, but no less traumatic.²

While I did not have to negotiate a trenchant border between India and Pakistan as Butalia had to do in her research, I did have to navigate those borders that continued to reside in the imaginations of those whom I interviewed. Another obstacle was that oral histories were often a stumbling point, for the limits and even resistance to remembering were all too evident.³ Nevertheless, the creative process for the research and development of the drama

became another means with which to imaginatively represent and connect with others through engaging with displaced and eclipsed histories among the British Asian diaspora, characterised as it is by its specific histories, and the intersectionality of gender, race/ethnicity, religion, caste and class.

Indeed, diasporic memories have not substantially entered into the scholarly work on partition. Nor have partition pasts been accounted for in migration and race/ethnicity studies.⁴ The former implicitly assumes that diasporic Asians are somehow inauthentic or far-removed who have little to offer on events that happened in the subcontinent. The latter comes with the assumption that those who migrated to Britain are mainly economic migrants from the mid-twentieth century without an earlier history of forced displacement;⁵ or the focus might be on a longer history that goes back to South Asian migration in earlier centuries.⁶ When British Asians are discussed with regards to forced displacement in the twentieth century, reference is most often made to those South Asian refugees from Kenya and Uganda in 1968 and 1972 respectively, those from Sri Lanka after civil war broke out in the 1980s, as well as irregular migration that continues to this day.⁷ Lesser known is how migrants from the subcontinent and even former refugees from eastern Africa had experienced and harboured histories of forced movement due to partition, histories that have remained eclipsed and/or suppressed for a number of reasons elaborated below. Although not intended as a generalisation for partition refugees, a few people I interviewed pointed out how their displacement was another factor in their decision to migrate overseas – both to get away from the punishing proximity of loss, and to start a new life afresh in distant lands. Relocated in a place where those from rival nations also had migrated and lived, their position in some cases afforded them a space to reconcile with experiences of acrimony and hostility, forge a degree of commonality along the lines of language, culture and/or class, and even befriend those they might have seen as from ‘enemy’ factions. In other cases, however, and with the rise of religious extremism and

Islamophobia, living in close proximity to those they saw as Other only hardened their erstwhile anxieties and animosities. This diasporic space of ‘subcontinental Britain’ then harbours both hybridity and initiative that departs, and communal essentialisms that draw succour from the political history of South Asia.

Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin ask: ‘How do we know partition except through the many ways it is transmitted to us, in its many representations’.⁸ In this article, I consider how multi-sensory modes of representation form a part of these transmissions, not just *from* the period of upheaval in the mid-1940s or what I call *archival fragments from below*, but also *about* the period of upheaval through a retrospective long-wide hall of mirrors arraigned across continents. Consequently, I will consider how representations were circulated, developed and received by theatre participants and audiences as part of interlocking performative contexts in Britain. They may be defined by three main registers: first, objects and memories from the partition period itself; second, those that may be from elsewhere but then are embedded in partition contexts; and third, those that throw light on the phenomena of partition from afar through fragments of skipping memories.

The first broad context may encompass imagery that are directly from the period of mass displacement, extremely rare in in that most people were too caught up in the urgency of only carrying bare essentials if anything at all. The second series of contexts may refer to free-floating representations, created in and on different time-spaces, but once embedded in semiotically rich contexts about partition take on new meanings and registers that can be equally emotive. I refer to such examples as *intersensory imagery* taken in its widest sense to include a wide range of media. Relatedly, a third case is of how objects and memories become part of a *generative archive* that encompasses a range of media on the theme of partition – a canon that is potentially endless. In this case, the archive is pieced together out

of tendrils that remain, tangible and intangible.⁹ It is an archive that is not just retrospective but also future-orientated in terms of what the fragment might catalyse.

The three registers compel us to move beyond visual cultures alone to consider a more multi-sensory and fragmentary realm of partition records and experiences. Building upon Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge's interocular field to refer to a variety of visual arenas for the 'socializing and regulating of the public gaze [that] is to some degree affected by the experiences of the other sites', I propose an intersensory field in the attempt to account for shreds of vernacular memories about partition - visual, narrativised, embodied, recited, sung, enacted, and digitalised.¹⁰ The range of transmissions here is broad but patchy, more so because we are dealing with marginalised rather than mainstream histories. Even though engaging only in oral histories, Menon and Bhasin's observations also apply to the generative archive:

Different sorts of telling reveal different truths, and the fragment is important precisely because it is marginal rather than mainstream, particular (even individual) rather than general, and because it represents history from below.¹¹

Before concentrating on these different sorts of telling, I first outline the research and production process for the play, *Silent Sisters*.

The Research and Creative Process

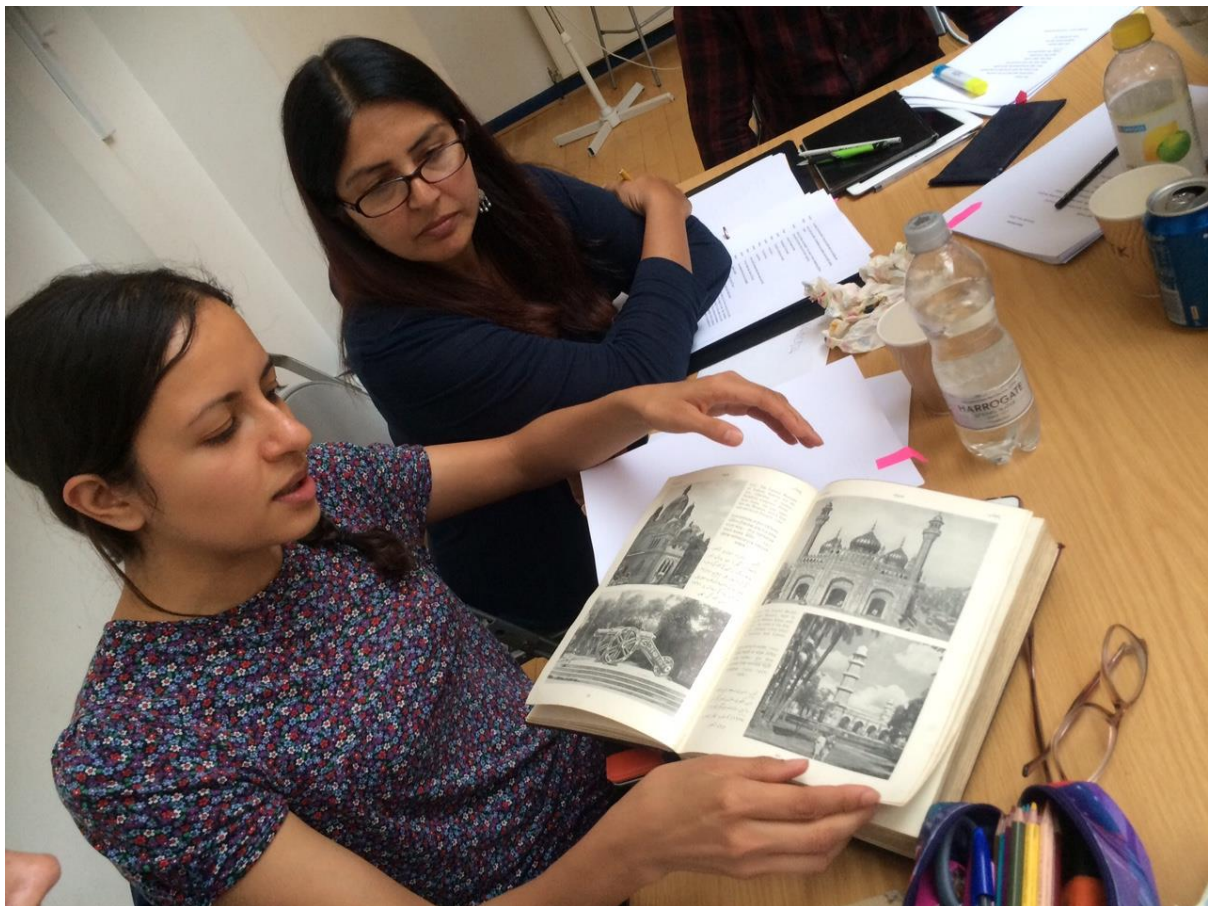
The development of *Silent Sisters* spanned several overlapping phases, mainly from July to September 2016 with an earlier preparatory stage regarding reading, planning and funding applications. Overall a dozen interviews and four workshops with a total of 40 women were

conducted in Brighton and Crawley supported by co-facilitator Smita Yadav in August and September 2016. Interviews were with British Asian men and women of Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and Christian backgrounds, and chosen on the basis of those who were known to be directly displaced and affected by partition and/or their younger family members. Workshop participants were selected through contacts and their networks in a snowballing process by the author and workshop facilitator with a particular objective to explore gendered violence in and around the time of partition and beyond.

Interviews were semi-structured with some questions prepared in advance to prompt participants but not intended to over-determine the flow of conversation. For workshops, there was a rough format and a list of possible questions that acted as sounding boards for sessions that lasted about two hours each. Plans were adapted and occasionally abandoned, especially if the women took the lead in contributing their stories, views and opinions. After a short introduction getting to know workshop participants, about 20-30 minutes were spent discussing any history of partition and migration in their families and/or among friends, followed by about half an hour discussing any stories that they had read/heard/seen that they appreciated about partition. With Butalia's pertinent question in mind, 'How does history look when seen through the eyes of women?', we then planned to split the women into groups imagining how might it have felt for women in south Asia and their experiences in the 1940s?¹² After sharing the discussion in the larger group, we broadened the discussion to forge wider links between partition experiences, other refugee movements and violence against women in times of political turbulence.

Throughout this research period that continued into the rehearsal period with five actors, I heard many stories (Figure 1). I fictionalised and touched upon several people's contribution in the script within a dramatic structure that ended up being divided into five acts. I took care to anonymise all participants' contributions unless they were comfortable

with their stories going public. Pseudonyms are used for interviewees and workshop participants but names of actors are retained as some of their experiences and contributions were also made available online with their permissions.¹³ The actors included Avita Jay (who played Amrit), Sandeep Garcha (who played Noor and Sukhwant), Javed Khan (Akbar, Beant and Iqbal), Diljohn Siddhu (Amir, Charan, Aman), and Saida Tani (Roza, singer) (Figure 2). I could not of course encompass everyone's stories in the final script. Nevertheless, conversations did inspire several threads in the play – particularly to do with settings, the nuance of Punjabi expressions, character development, and certain events that are either depicted or alluded to in the drama.



1. Avita Jay (who plays Amrit) and Sandeep Garcha (Noor and Sukhwant) browse archival photographs during *Silent Sisters* rehearsals. Photograph by Raminder Kaur.



2. Scene from *Silent Sisters* (from left to right): Diljohn Siddhu (as Amin), Sandeep Garcha (as Noor), Saida Tani (as Roza) and Javed Khan (as Akbar). Photograph by Tarun Jasani.

The central narrative in the developed script revolves around a Sikh-Hindu woman, Amrit, and a Muslim woman, Noor. They find themselves at the bottom of a well above drowned female bodies, while everyone else flees and/or butchers each other above them (Figure 3). The setting for the well owed more to artistic license than actual testimony, as it did to the decision to create a liminal zone where two women from different religious backgrounds are forced to meet at a time of raging communalism. I had heard that several women jumped into wells to escape from attackers and to keep their honour intact. Some were known to have survived. A few wells had later been closed off due to the superstition and pollution associated with the waters. Urvashi Butalia recounts that in one case, ‘Ninety women jumped into the small well. Only three were saved: there was not enough water in the well to drown them all’.¹⁴ But I did not encounter any such victim-survivors for even if they survived their fall, they would then have been in ‘enemy territory’ and many of them either killed or converted and living another life. When reaching the limits of our memories, explanations

and resources, the power of the imagination becomes the main engine to transport ourselves to dark periods in the past.



3. Amrit and Noor in *Silent Sisters*. Photograph by Tarun Jasani.

A section of the script proceeds as follows set in what is now Pakistan, with Punjabi expressions paraphrased in the English where necessary.

In the well, Amrit goes to slap Noor across the face. Noor is startled, and then has difficulties trying to breathe. She vomits into the water. Noor starts wailing.

Amrit Bhaim pai gi. You're seeing things.

Noor Who are you?

Amrit Amrit.

Noor Where from?

Amrit From this village above.

Noor So am I. But I've never seen you before.

Amrit What can you see down here??

Noor Sardarni hai?

Amrit Hor ki? Daughter of a Sikh sardar, principal in this village.

Noor And now you're down here? (*starts laughing manically*). Aapni izzat ley.

Amrit Ha. For my family's honour.

Noor Izzat daffa howe.

Amrit Jo sade karma vich si. It's our fate. They could not look after us. We could not look after ourselves.

Noor At least we are queens here.

Amrit Hah! The dead are your subjects. You can command them to do whatever you want. Fool! At least we won't die from thirst (*laughs bitterly and quotes Rumi*). 'For in the fountain of the Water of Life – there I shall die!

Noor Be quiet. You're annoying me.

Amrit Well, you're lumped with me for company. Me and these corpses. At least prepare yourself for the next life.

Noor There is no next life. It's this or mitti. Dust, ashes. That's all. You pagans believe in the next life. We don't.

Amrit Even down here you carry your poison. Hatred in the name of religion! What are you doing down here?

Noor Same as you? Honour.

Amrit He abandoned you then?

Noor Yes.

Amrit (*to herself*) This land of the pure, land of the Musselman, is only land for men.

Noor He took my baby. Then he took one of your women. Said that he could not look after two women. And then before I knew it, (*manically*) talaq talaq talaq.

Amrit Now of all times he divorces you??? Even you people cannot stick together.

Noor The earth is not for people. It's for beasts. Monsters. Jinns.

Amrit So he gave you opium and threw you in?

Noor Hor ki?

Amrit Well, I suppose now is the best time to get away with murder.

A little later in the play, the two women are forced to face their differences in what Noor begins to call 'her Pakistan'.

Amrit Why are you so contrary?

Noor I'm not contrary.

Amrit See! Contrary over a country!

Noor Well, you're a foreigner now.

Amrit A foreigner in my own home. You know...I'm one of *yours* as well. A woman. Always silent in our suffering. Then suffering in our silence. [...]

Amrit I want to leave this earth with a light heart. I want to be able to forgive them.

Noor Who's they?

Amrit My brothers.

Noor My brother was so good to me.

Amrit So were mine. Until the mob were on their way.

Noor And your family forced you to jump down here?

Amrit They did not force me. I jumped willingly. It was either this well or be taken and abused by the mob. And if they took me, my family would die a double death.

Noor You have to die to keep their honour. (*laughs*) Wouldn't it be funny if my husband had taken you?

Amrit What's so funny about it?

Noor Then I would curse you even more.

Amrit Your men are beasts.

Noor And so are yours! They are doing the same thing over there in *your* India.

Amrit I have never even been to *my* India.

Noor That bloody border was drawn and now you have your shiney new India.
Chamakda, chamakda...

Without giving the whole story away, the two women eventually make a concerted decision to not capitulate to death but strive to survive.

Noor How many women do you think are down here?

Amrit 50 may be. 60. I'm not sure.

Noor That many? And only you survived?

Amrit I suppose there's no room even in hell.

Noor How old are you?

Amrit Nearly 18. And you?

Noor In my 30s. (*pause*) Poor women.

They hear something above them and a bit of commotion. Amrit and Noor look up nervously. A male voice shouts down.

Iqbal Anyone down there?

The women look at each other, and wonder what to do. Amrit is shaking her head, signalling to be quiet. Noor is reticent and then decides to ignore her.

Noor Kaun hai? Whose there?

Iqbal Who are you?

Noor Your name?

Iqbal Mera naam Iqbal hai.

Noor Iqbal what?

Iqbal We can talk when you come up.

Amrit *(to Noor)* Do you think he's Muslim or Sikh?

Noor Who knows?

Iqbal I'm throwing the rope down. You take it and we can talk up here.

A rope descends with a bucket on the end that splashes into the water in front of them. The women look at the rope and then at each other.

[...]

Iqbal Massla ki hai? Are you going to hold the rope or not?

Noor We're coming.

Amrit *(to Noor)* You're going?? You said you didn't want to.

Noor This could be a life line.

Amrit Or it could be a hangman's noose. I want to stay here.

Noor Chad pare, kuriye! You're coming with me.

Amrit I'm staying.

Noor Hold the sides. I'll go up first. Then I'll call you up.

Amrit No! Don't leave me.

Noor Then you go up first.

Amrit No. I can't.

Noor Then I go up and check they're alright.

Amrit Alright!! Alright!! Who's all right nowadays???

Noor You either die here or you die there. Or you die here and live there? At least you get to see your *(pause)* our Panjab one more time.

Iqbal Are you coming? Or shall I come down there myself?

[...]

Noor grabs for the rope and passes it to Amrit. Amrit starts trembling and sobbing.

Noor Take this. You're going first. I don't trust you down here. (*pause*) Sister.

Noor takes off a small metallic pendant on a black string (a tawiz) from her neck and puts it around Amrit's neck.

Noor With this tawiz, they may think you're a Muslim. Tell them you were married to Rahman from Chatto. And that he and your children were slaughtered on the train to Lahore. And that you survived underneath the corpses. And you came here to find your mother. But she too was killed. And in your despair you jumped.

Amrit How can you do this for me? How can I leave you?

Noor It's nothing. And it's only for a moment.

Amrit You had better grab the rope when we drop it again. Promise.

Noor This is not the time to keep promises.

Amrit You give me your promise. Or else?

Noor Or else what?

Iqbal Are you coming?

Noor God be with you.

Amrit God is merciful. Not any Hindu, Muslim or Sikh God. Just God. And we shall be fine (Figure 4).



4. Amrit and Noor in *Silent Sisters*. Photograph by Juan Carlos Orihuela Cuesta.

Other scenes in the play take us back to an earlier time in the Punjab before the communal troubles flared up. The fact that I interviewed people in Britain compelled me also to situate the story not just in India/Pakistan in the 1940s, but also from the perspective of a British Asian family visiting the region in the 1980s in one of the acts. Indeed, in a case of mirrored serendipity, two of the actors in the play turned out to be the children of partition refugees – one family fleeing eastwards from what became west Pakistan, and the other westwards, from what is now India - more on which follows.

Archival Fragments from Below

Even though South Asian populations place a great importance on the photograph as a record of relatives and key events, hardly any exist in their repertoires from around the time of

partition.¹⁵ Of course, those who had to run, ran, taking with them where possible what could be carried by human or bullock cart, and even this was at great risk to potential robberies and desecration en route. Where any imagery become available from this stormy period, they take on even more staggering significance as if they contained one's dear life.

Those who travelled by boat from ports in what became India and Pakistan were the 'lucky' ones who had the comparative luxury of being able to take a suitcase of clothing and items with them, as one interviewee put it.¹⁶ But even here, circumstances were fraught: one person recalled how she saw a mother who nearly lost her child in a commotion in Karachi to get onto a boat heading for Indian shores. Of the 'partition boat refugees' traveling from the region that became India, one was a maternal uncle to Javed Khan, one of the actors in the play. Siraj-Ud-Din, or Chotai Mamu as he was addressed by his nephew, was a photographer living in the north eastern state of Bihar who travelled with his extended family by boat to Karachi (Figure 5). The decision to head westwards rather than eastwards owed to Javed's maternal grandfather who had earlier migrated from near the north Afghan border to north east India in his youth. Siraj-Ud-Din took photographs in his suitcase, and set up another photographic studio in Karachi shortly after arriving in the new nation of Pakistan. Later in the early 1960s, Javed as a young boy (Figure 6) travelled with his father to Liverpool on the ship, R.M.S. (Royal Mail Ship) Caledonia, now decommissioned (Figures 7 and 8). His family ended up in Yorkshire where he grew up before coming south to pursue his fine art career prior to acting.



5. Photographer, Siraj-Ud-Din, circa 1953 in Karachi, Pakistan. Photograph courtesy of Javed Khan.



6. Javed Khan as a young boy. Photograph courtesy of Javed Khan and taken by his maternal uncle, Siraj-Ud-Din, in Pakistan, circa 1958.



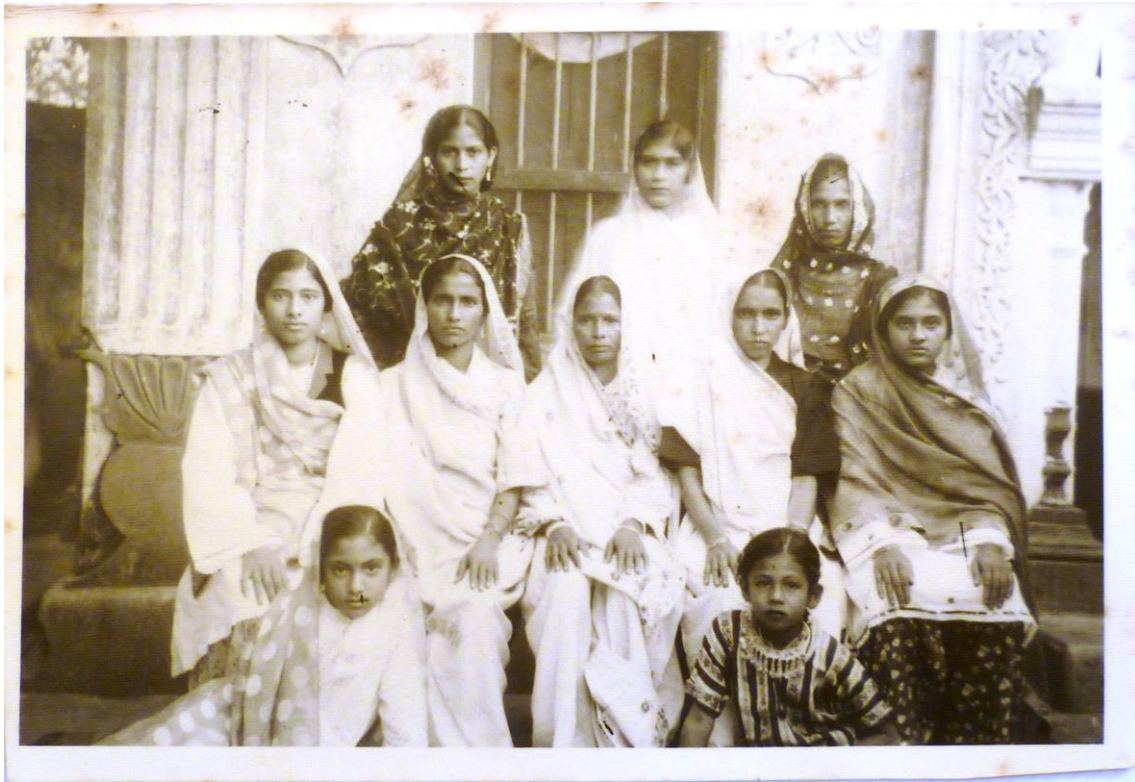
7. R.M.S. Caledonia (Anchor Line, 1948). Photograph by Paul Strathdee, Liverpool, December 1965.



8. Javed's father, Wali Mohammed with his brothers, Fakhru and Shah Zaman (left to right) in Liverpool circa 1960. Photograph courtesy of Javed Khan.

Javed talked with fondness about his now deceased maternal uncle, and the photographs that his family brought with them from the subcontinent. One image was from before partition around 1945. It showed his maternal grandmother (Nani, middle-seated) and female members of her family with his own mother sitting on the floor to our right as a young child (Figure 9). The photograph was taken in their courtyard in their house in Bihar, after which they decided to leave for west Pakistan. Another photograph was taken around 1949 in their new home in the Pakpattan District in the Punjab province of Pakistan (Figure 10). Javed explained:

My nana [maternal grandfather] and mum (bottom left) after the partition, North Pakistan in their new-built home around 1949. Photo by my uncle. We were lucky to have these pics as he was a photographer. Mamu ended up having a photo studio in Karachi. I remember it, where he did portraits and 10x8 lobby pics for cinemas. My dad helped him with hand colouring them [sic].



9. Javed Khan's maternal relatives in India, circa 1945. Photograph courtesy of Javed Khan.



10. Javed Khan's maternal relatives in Pakistan, circa 1949. Photograph courtesy of Javed Khan.

His father's hand colouring skills are evident in photographs taken by Siraj-Ud-Din of himself and his wife in Karachi (Figures 11 and 12).



11 and 12. Javed Khan's parents: Suriya Begum, circa 1949, and Wali Mohammed and Suriya Begum, circa 1953. Photographs by Siraj-Ud-Din with post-print colouring by Wali Mohammed and courtesy of Javed Khan.

At a time of photographic scarcity for the disenfranchised, such records of vernacular and domestic life by South Asians from before and after partition become priceless. The photographs may not be as epic as those taken by relatively comfortable elites, but therein lies their especial intimacy. They vindicate what Dilpreet Bhullar has described as 'voices from below' as opposed to the grand narrative or 'high politics' epitomised in Margaret Bourke-White's photography for *The Great Migration: Five Million Indians Flee for Their Lives* (1947). Although vastly different subject matter, there is evidently a clash of aesthetics. While Siraj-ud-Din's photographs emphasise the frontality of dignity and repose in the intimacy of a female-strong household, Burke's photojournalism concentrates on the angular,

dramatic and event-driven for wider publics. Reproduced in *Life* magazine, Bourke-White's photographs were striking in their realist starkness, but another iteration of the 'wretched of the earth' in a 'savage subcontinent'.¹⁷

Photographic fragments from below are less about what Susan Sontag discusses in terms of death anxieties where she notes:

All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photography's testify to time's relentless melt.¹⁸

Rather, contra Sontag, the photographs of Javed's extended family are examples of *memento vitae*, a visual testimony to the resilient spirit of survival that helped the family uproot and reconstruct new lives afresh: everyday heroes in the deep wrinkles of grand histories.

Sandeep Garcha recounted a counter-journey narrative but without any mementoes from the partition era. Memories passed down from her parents relay an overnight escapade from the Lahore region towards Delhi, a challenging journey in which they could take little with them except the clothes on their back. She also recalled that the family had buried their gold in the courtyard of their home, hoping that one day they would be able to return to their ancestral home. By comparison, Javed recounted how some of his acquaintances found gold in the courtyard of their new home – a fateful miscarriage of justice for some, but exchanged in jest when Sandeep joked back, 'It's mine', during the rehearsal process (Figure 13).



13. Sandeep Garcha and Javed Khan rehearse for *Silent Sisters*. Photograph by Raminder Kaur.

Without any photographic records and with memories in eclipse, Sandeep drew upon her ancestral history to visualise and dramatise the characters she portrayed in the play. Drawing on the sorrows of human beings as well as their farm animals that they acutely relied upon, she recounted:

I was born in Ludhiana, Punjab in India and lived in Uttar Pradesh, Chandigarh and Delhi. I have friends and family in all these places and with some the common thread is the conversations about partition. My mother's grandparents and other family members (my mother's uncles) came to India from a small village Chak Pandrah (15) near Lahore, Pakistan to refugee camps on the Indian side before they were given houses and land to compensate for what they had lost in Pakistan. These were the houses that people had left behind as they went to the other side of the border. The authorities would make the required enquiries and investigations to check what the families had back in Pakistan and try and match that in India. My great grandparents were given a place in Dagam, in Garhshankar (a small place in Punjab on the Indian side). Then they moved to a bigger house and land later on after the enquiries.

Some people came on bullock carts but my great grandparents crossed the border on foot. They came as a "karvaan" (big group of people walking on foot). As they were on foot they couldn't bring any of their possessions with them, apart from some very basic things. They used to talk about the houses they left behind with their life's possessions – clothes,

utensils, jewellery. A big sore point was the animals. My mother tells me, whenever the grandparents talked about the animals, they said it was really sad times, where even the cattle knew what was going on and they were crying when they had to leave them behind.

I feel it's sad that we don't know a lot about our own history. It's only because I asked my mother about any recollections from the time of partition, that she mentioned the Jallianwala Bagh massacre even though that was from a different time in 1919. One of my mother's uncles was a student at the time and was at the gurdwara (Sikh temple) for Baisakhi celebrations. He was one of the survivors of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre where hundreds of people were shot down by the British Indian army in a walled garden. A lot of the memories are hazy as my mother put it, and also very painful. When she started telling me I feel a lot of the things just came up which I wasn't even aware of like the connection with Jallianwala Bagh and having a freedom fighter in the family. My grandmother's brother was a freedom fighter and used to get the freedom fighter's pension. I think that generation was humble and never talked up anything they did. They just carried on with a fighting spirit and a will to survive.

Sandeep's journey with the play *Silent Sisters* became a prompt to find out more about her past, in the process of which she learnt not just more about partition but also about her mother's uncle who was one of the few who survived the Jallianwala Bhag massacre – an incident in 1919 when about a thousand non-violent protesters and Baisakhi celebrators were fired upon by the Indian Army under the command of Colonel Reginald Dyer. Rather than trying to represent their experiences through word or image, her ancestor's embraced and embodied them in human qualities - qualities that lent Sandeep much inspiration in the craft of enacting her roles.

Intersensory Imagery

Faced with the scarcity of imagery from the period outside of colonial British news and documentary footage, I looked to other sources for inspiration for the play and as visual

prompts to share with others. I read widely, surfed online and watched films and documentaries on partition, but none grabbed my attention as much as a deep blue and fiery red artwork depicting one, perhaps two women: an untitled oil painting on an evocative yet ambiguous topic. I have long been an admirer of Arpana Caur's artworks for their redolent colours and composition along with their creative commentaries on burning issues to do with women, violence and communalism. Descended from a former refugee family, her mother, the renowned writer, Ajeet Cour, had to move from Lahore at the age of thirteen. Arpana Caur had painted several works on partition as well as the pogrom against Sikhs in Delhi after the assassination of the prime minister, Indira Gandhi, by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. Rather than these more conspicuous works, I was drawn towards another of her works painted in 1999. The untitled painting depicts the shaded dark outlines of a woman against a fiercely reddish background, replicated in a white outline as if it was a ghostly shadow of the more substantive body. With a pair of scissors the woman cuts into a sparkling midnight blue sky with a crescent moon that seems to be cascading to the ground (Figure 14).



14. 'Untitled', painting by Arpana Caur, oil on canvas, 4x6 feet, 1999.

Scissors are a recurring emblem in Caur's art. She explained:

I needed a metaphor for time. The Greeks believe that scissors have the power to cut Man's fate that is in a state of perpetual suspension, so I thought let me use the scissors.¹⁹

The image resonated with the play with its focus on two women caught up in the twisted hands of suspended Time. Eventually, they took Time into their own hands and made some fateful decisions.

The fact that Caur gave her permissions to use the painting as part of *Silent Sisters* research and publicity was a spark for further inspiration. An untitled artwork was embedded in the context of the partition play's development that evocatively charged the *pain-ting* while generating long-wide connective tissue across the oceans of time and space.

In this creative venture, poetry and song cannot go unheeded. Punjabi writer, Amrita Pritam, has written a soul-stirring poem where she compared the shattering of the earth with the star-crossed love of Heer and Ranjha, a tale authored by the eighteenth century Sufi writer, Waris Shah. Transliterated into English, although also sung in Punjabi, it begins with an address to the dead author:

I say to Waris Shah today, speak from your grave
And add a new page to your book of love.

Once one daughter of Punjab wept, and you wrote your long saga;
Today thousands weep, calling to you Waris Shah:

Arise, o' friend of the afflicted; arise and see the state of Punjab,
Corpses strewn on fields, and the Chenaab flowing with much blood.

Someone filled the five rivers with poison,
And this same water now irrigates our soil.

Where was lost the flute, where the songs of love sounded?
And all Ranjha's brothers forgotten to play the flute.

Blood has rained on the soil, graves are oozing with blood,
The princesses of love cry their hearts out in the graveyards.

Today all the Quaidons [Leaders] have become the thieves of love and beauty,
Where can we find another one like Waris Shah?

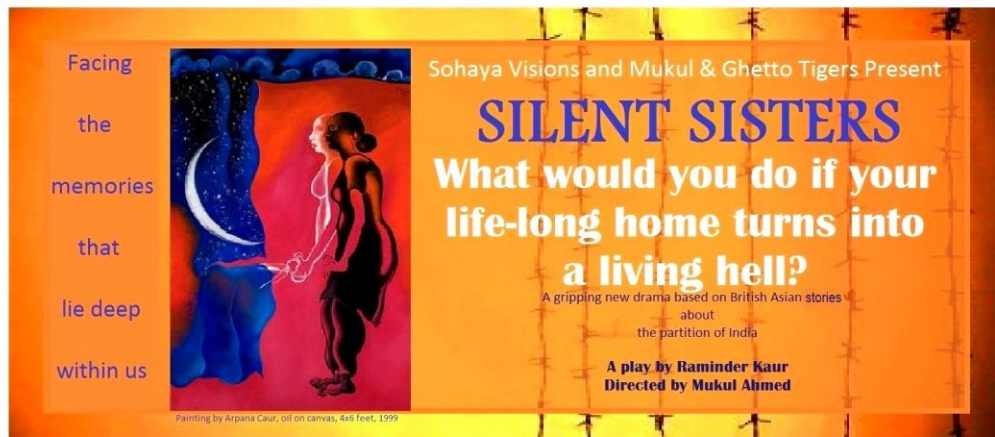
Waris Shah! I say to you, speak from your grave
And add a new page to your book of love.

The poem was transformed into a song performed by Saida Tani during the play in Britain and used as the leitmotif for the short trailer on the show.²⁰ Its dramatic overture recalls the bitter-sweet love story of Heer and Ranjha and applies it to the acrimonious split between two

consummate regions and cultures. The love that bound two peoples became torn apart due to a vortex of hatred and warring machinations.

In view of contemporary refugee and humanitarian crises, *Silent Sisters* became to be seen by artists, participants and audiences alike as a parable to the plight of displaced people in general and women more specifically. The publicity material opened up such questions to ask: ‘What would you do if your life-long home turns into a living hell?’ (Figure 15). Several of the workshop participants and audience members made comparisons with contemporary concerns, most notably about those who were displaced from the civil war in Syria and surrounding regions. British Asians who lived in Uganda recalled the time that they had to flee the country in 1972, and how women in particular were at risk of being raped and abducted. Despite the ordeals, one woman recalled a story of personal triumph:

In Uganda we lost our citizenship overnight. We felt so vulnerable because we couldn't protest nor complain as everything had turned against Indians including the country's law...At the airport when leaving Uganda, all our belongings were searched thoroughly and some possessions had to be left behind. Before boarding our flight, there were several checkpoints where our luggage was checked for anything valuable...I managed to secure some valuable jewellery, sewn away at the bottom of my petticoat under my saree.



15. *Silent Sisters* publicity, 2016.

Others in the post-show audience discussion talked about Irish history: ‘I am Irish and familiar with notions of partition, British invasion and migration’. Another who alluded to the Balkanisation of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, enthused about how the play protagonists were like ‘ambassadors of peace’. One other audience member recalled the Ottoman Greek massacre in the early part of the twentieth century, when women too jumped off cliffs, and into rivers and wells in order to ‘save their honour’. Intersensory imagery became both specific and universalised to talk about people’s plight in times of political upheavals, and to bring home the message that forced displacement and violence could happen to anyone, anywhere and anytime. Migrant movements in a fortifying Europe made such long-wide parallels all the more necessary to make.

The Generative Archive

The third main area in this enquiry may well accommodate all the above in the generative and intersensory oeuvre of partition representations. When talking to elderly British Asians who were directly displaced about their experiences, I asked whether they had kept any artefacts from the period. All invariably replied no: that this was the last thing on their mind, and that it was not a time for the retrieval of personal mementoes. For one workshop participant in Crawley, a steel basin was the most important object for her from the period of displacement, even though her family had no interest in keeping the item for posterity. The small basin enabled her mother to pick up scraps to eat to fend for her young family, perhaps even cook with, as they travelled thousands of miles on foot. But there was no importance attached to the bowl from the time of partition, other than it served its purpose and now it is part of their memories. It was a small chink in the armour of her family's survival story that mattered for its utility value, but was not fetishised in the struggle for survival and its shattered aftermath. However, the woman admitted that her mother now had senile dementia, and that her experiences from partition which she could not reconcile with nor erase were coming out through her mind and body. She elaborated:

She puts her finger in a steel bowl, and licked it as if her baby could see her eating and being satisfied. That she wasn't hungry [on the long walk to India]. She still does that to this day.

Memories of stoically carrying on at a time of scarce food that posed numerous challenges on the mother's role as nourisher were returning to her mother through her gestures. This contribution was directly simulated in the play.

Another person recalled how it was prayer and songs that kept them going. In his interview, a man in his late 70s sang a verse that he remembered hearing from his mother at

the time. He permitted me to record it as he sung in a plaintive voice to a tune reminiscent of Punjabi wedding songs when the bride leaves her natal home:

Puchla Jinnah nu, Jaana kehre rah nu? Ghar bagh chadke. Balbache chadke. Puchla Jinnah nu.

(Go and ask Jinnah [Pakistan's premier], Which way to take? Having left the house and garden. Having left the small children. Go and ask Jinnah.

This short song highlighted how the political elites placed the lives and livelihoods of so many ordinary people in jeopardy and havoc. The politicians might have made national gains but others lost everything including their entitlement to a future through their children. This song too was played in rehearsals and dramatised for the play: Avita Jay singing it as Amrit and giving the fragility of a septuagenarian male voice a more lyrical, feminine touch.²¹ In the process, a fleeting tendril from the past was recorded for posterity.

Another septuagenarian recalled the desperation of the times where they had nothing. Even though she was only a child of eight at the time, some things stuck with her for life:

My dad was an educationalist. He knew some people in the military and they managed to get some trucks across for the young girls and women. I went on the truck on my own, and they took me to safety, a refugee camp. We used to stand in lines for food and water. I don't remember whether I changed my clothes or not. But I had nothing with me. I heard that my nana and nani [maternal grandparents] ran from the hordes. And my nani fell as her foot got stuck in the uneven land, She fell and they took her. My nana survived. He kept running. [starts crying]

People ran and hid in the dark if they were left alone. Some went in the drains (*naalia*). This was how desperate it was. Some people took a *gadda* (bullock cart). They

packed it with bowls, mattresses. But in the end they threw the mattress in the river so as to make the *gadda* lighter. There was no use for them. It was raining so badly. Our clothes would get wet but there would be no sun the next day for them to dry.

It was not just a time of *garam hava* (scorching winds) but sodden misery coming out through the embodied memories of the cruelty of humanity and ecology. Several elderly participants recalled the monsoon rains and floods of the time to add to their woes. It was as if the heavens too were ransacked by grief. One woman recalled: ‘Something that’s not written in the history books: there was a massive flood, the heavens poured, rivers flooded, and some people died this way, and through the extreme hunger’.²² She elaborated:

People were wet through and through with no clothes to change into. Some were swept away by the rising waters of the river. The flood (*harh*) also took the corpses away. Bodies lay around everywhere and were swept down. This kind of flood we would never have seen again.

Despite the downpour all around them, rivers and wells became difficult to drink from for refugees on their long journeys as they were invariably full of corpses.²³ One man also transmitted the corporeal memory of chilling dampness. He related:

I remember the rains and the floods [when we were leaving what is now Pakistan]. There was so much rain around that time. We were wet through and through. We were walking...One time we were sitting on the edge of a road surrounded by water. We could not move....I saw a documentary recently about nomads in Kenya and they have to go through a valley to get to the other side. And there are crocodiles waiting in the river on the way. That’s how it was like. We were surrounded by water and mobs would lie around like crocodiles waiting to attack us. We were most vulnerable at night. But the boys used to get whatever they had –

swords, stones – to make sure we stayed safe. It was a very bad time. A very bad time. I would not wish for anyone to go through anything like we did.

These first hand experiences deeply informed the atmosphere of the script and its enactment. They were also shared with others in workshops with younger participants that unleashed a series of other narrative connections. An Indian Muslim woman in her 20s living in Britain as an international student talked about her family. There was no denying that she owed her current position in Britain to some vital decisions made by her great grandmother:

My great grandparents were freedom fighters...They lived in Delhi...Partition happened and they were completely surrounded by a mob, and they were going to break down their door and kill all of them. Both were very secular. They did not believe that partition could happen. They refused to move. They were thinking: our neighbours would never let this happen; we are safe in our locality. So they refused to move. Until the mob came...My great grandfather had his hunting rifle ready. And he had six daughters. There was no poison at home [to take one's own life]. If the mob breaks through in then he was ready to shoot and kill his daughters because he didn't want them to be raped and then killed. It was only because my great grandmother's brother-in-law who had connections with politicians. They were airlifted out...in the nick of time. She had to leave everything behind....She had literally nothing. They moved to Calcutta which was where they started. I'm sitting here today because of the decision my great grandmother had made at that time. She had a few gold bangles. She sold all of them. And instead of keeping them for her daughter's dowry or for food or for shelter, she put her daughters into schools. And those daughters went on to become successful women in their own respective fields, and then their daughters, well, one of them is me. It was a very testing time. I think people's true character was tested at that time. It was horrible and vicious and there was so much blood everywhere but you had to be very fast and grow out of it.

Most of all, she was grateful to her great grandmother who took the decision to contact her brother-in-law, and later to sell her gold bangles to fund her daughters' education rather than their dowries. Such testimonies ring true with Menon and Bhasin's observations on how

women who made it to safety took the initiative to pursue educational and vocational careers that they may not otherwise have done had they stayed in their former homes before partition.²⁴ For some, great rupture also enabled great opportunities.

The yearning to try and grasp the impact of partition on families and thereby understand oneself in the process is also apparent in another woman's testimony. To some extent, she was able to connect with her past through the internet and see her ancestral home across the border in what is now India. In a remarkable account, she also pointed out how her father had escorted the future leader of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, to the meeting with India's premier, Jawaharlal Nehru and the man who was bestowed with the task of drawing the lines of partition, Cyril Radcliffe. She stated:

My father is a Sufi, and my great great grandfather was a Sufi saint. He grew up during the Raj [British colonial era] and they put partition right through his village...But he never talked about it...When I approached my father about it, he found it very difficult. But he did manage to bring out a full poster size photograph of the palace he grew up in. And I managed to take a photograph of it....It's [the building] not there anymore. So my great great grandfather's grave is looked after by Sikhs, and that's on the Indian side now. It's on YouTube. I can see his shrine on YouTube...But when my father died recently, then some of the uncles began to speak a little more...I learnt that he escorted Jinnah to that meeting with Radcliffe when they drew the line. At that time he would have been 19, 20. I'm imagining that he very much grew up with the idea of having an Islamic saint. But also he was a Sufi, so completely open-minded and a socialist. He had friends from all nationalities. He didn't discriminate....When the British left he had first hand witnessed the violence. They were telling me that his servants got their heads chopped off with a machete...A lot of his family went to Lahore. The British manipulated, caused political unrest in a country that was operating quite well with all the religions that were going on before. He was very much involved with the political activities. I need to dig deep, now that I'm in touch with his side of the family. I can ask them...He hardly went back [to Pakistan]. We went as a family when I think was four years old. For eight months. But I don't remember much. He had two separate lives. I begged him at the end: can

we write your memories and can we record it? But he found it too painful because he witnessed these atrocities first hand.

Even though talking was difficult and experiences did not get shared to the extents that she would have liked, she tried to ‘dig deep’ into her ancestry, emboldened by photographic and architectural fragments. Mirroring the care and maintenance of prominent Sikh gurdwaras by Muslims in Pakistan, the Sufi shrines in Indian Punjab are looked after by Sikh trustees, ones to which she wanted to make a personal pilgrimage.²⁵ Ironically, this cross-border journey is made much easier for those holding foreign passports as opposed to those people living and mired in the fraught politics of contemporary India and Pakistan, a phenomena that has been described by Menon and Bhasin for those living across the line of partition as a case of ‘so-near-yet-so-farness’.²⁶

The story of her great great grandfather’s grave in a shrine otherwise known as the Hazrat Imam Ali Shah Sahib in the Indian village of Gurdaspur relates a time of neglect and disregard after partition (Figure 16). The current octogenarian caretaker, Gurcharan Singh, used to store his fertiliser in the shrine. He eventually was struck down by a mysterious illness. One night, as local lore, goes:

An old man, in white radiating robes with a staff in his hands is standing there. The boy offers the old man a well come as he has already met him many times. The old man looks at the boy kindly and bades him to the parents: ‘If ROZA SHARIEF is cleared of the dumped stock, your father will get well’ [sic].²⁷



16. Hazrat Imam Ali Shah Sahib, Sufi shrine in Gurdaspur, India. Photograph by Basanta Rajkumar. Creative Commons.²⁸

The boy told his parents the next day. His mother washed the premises and lit a *diya* (an earthen rapeseed oil lamp) in the shrine. His father, Gurcharan Singh, was miraculously cured, and when people heard the news, they came to congratulate him. From then on, a *mela* or fair has been held in honour of ‘Baba ji’ at the shrine in order to celebrate non-sectarian love and respect for all humanity. With the unearthing of such fragments of information and material, a generative intersensory archive can be developed and shared with others: building upon absences and presences, connections and disconnections, through a variety of transmissions – material, sonic, embodied, narrativised, photographed, performed, digitalised and imagined.

A Coming Community

The research and arts project, *Silent Sisters*, enabled a non-judgemental and non-partisan means with which to engage with and share memories and representations about the partition of the subcontinent with a broader audience in Britain. In the process, gender was highlighted as stories were circulated about how women suffered at the hands of patriarchal and patriotic fervour, a phenomenon that has now been well-documented in the literature on those who reside in South Asia.²⁹ However, in the process of doing the research for the drama, I also noted how men were silent and reluctant to talk about certain issues. On balance and contrary to assumption, it was men who were less talkative about the partition period when compared to the women. This was due to a number of reasons: not wanting to engage with that period of history as a consequence of the agony of loss and terrible acts that they saw; deep regret and memories of emasculation in that they could not do anything about what was going on around them; and possibly, acts of terror that they partook in, not all of which, understandably, they felt comfortable to recount. As one woman reflected in a workshop in Brighton:

Both my parents' families are from a place in Pakistan. The stories come from my paternal grandfather and maternal grandmother. They tell a similar story in that they were both moneyed, wealthy landowners such that my grandmother was 'too posh' to go to school even....And there's this story of arriving in Delhi and life being very difficult. Initially not in a refugee camp. Then in a refugee camp for some time. Then that was followed by many decades of grinding poverty, reading by lamplight. Both families were very very poor and education was the only way out. To be fair, both families did extremely well and then prospered. Emotionally their responses were very different. My paternal grandfather was just scarred. Looking back I suspect he had PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]. Whenever he talked about it, his eyes would fill up, he was just in deep trauma....I think it ruined his capacity to love, so it completely ruined his family life, which is sad. Whereas on my mother's side - my grandmother is just this incredible woman...She remained psychologically

robust...and somehow she was able to make some peace with it so it wasn't such a traumatising event...My dad and uncles still have some paranoiac tendency. You can see how this emotional trauma has impacted on their children, and perhaps their children's children.

In her view, not being able to reconcile with the past led to emotional and verbal paralysis.

Menon and Bhasin note in their oral histories: 'Occasionally, we reach a point in the story where memory refuses to enter speech'.³⁰ Silence pervaded all sectors due to a combination of structural and experiential forces. There were limits on language alone. The discussion on rape and abduction was particularly difficult vindicating Rao's observations that 'it is easier to look at death than at pain. In one, the grief lingers and then passes with time. In the other, it is relentless. It is unerring'.³¹ One woman stated in an interview in very stark terms: 'If you were a woman, they will say it is better that you are dead. Nobody wanted to look after her if she had tooth marks and tattoos [from violent branding] all over her'.

Such chilling recollections of gendered violence had a remarkable way of forging new commonalities across ethnic, regional and national divisions. In a workshop held in Brighton, there were five twice-migrant Gujarati women in their 50s, a Maharashtrian Hindu in her 40s who had married an English man, two students from India in their 20s including one Muslim, a British Hindu Punjabi woman in her 40s, and a woman in her 40s whose father was a partition refugee from Pakistan who had travelled to Britain and married an Irish woman. Despite coming from diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, the participants found common grounds to do with their experiences as women spurred on by their discussion on South and diasporic Asian cultures, masculinities, and gender relations. One woman reflected on the period of partition:

The section of society who had it worse were women and children. Men were killed, they got robbed. But with women – they were used, raped, forced into sexual slavery, like a harem for yourself, forced into becoming a wife. Women weren't just killed. They were raped first by a number of men. Then you could hope for death. May be they'll leave you like that. And on top of that, fathers and brothers would kill the women themselves.

As highlighted with Amrit's story in the play, murder by relatives was a last resort to retain family honour tied in with a burden of care so as to spare women from the prospect of more pain. A woman at the workshop elaborated:

My own great grandfather would have killed all his own daughters had the mob reached there first. Because he believed, and I think his wife believed it herself, that it was much better to kill the daughters first, rather than see them get tortured, raped and then get killed. So just kill them, just give them an easy death...In a riot situation it just goes crazy. If you happen to be surrounded by people who are not from the same religion as you then you just become an easy target.

She went on to discuss how the fear of communal riots for minorities in India remains disturbingly real, and why some would even move to a less salubrious area so as to be surrounded by people of their own creed should a match be ignited in a communally charged tinderbox.

Among the workshop groups, there were different opinions and degrees of knowledge about South Asian history and politics. Yet the women got on with each other. One participant did not know much about partition, having been brought up in Britain without a history of partition in her family: 'Unbelievable, you have enlightened me'. An e-mail group was formed in this case where those women who were digitally connected wanted to continue the dialogue and keep in touch. They invited each other to functions and shared information and feedback with each other such as: 'I've never met a lot of you, and I'm quite surprised

that we all live in Brighton'; 'Yes I echo all that's been said, a joy to meet you all and hope to see you all again!'

The process of research and development of *Silent Sisters* went some way to creating a 'coming political if not artistic community' as the editors phrase it, and, however momentary. go some way to vindicating what Giorgio Agamben elaborates as a community with an 'inessential commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence'.³² The workshop group acted as a definite supplement, as another form of the right to speak about one's histories, experiences and viewpoints and to form bonds across several intersectional points of difference enabled by their diasporic position. Despite the gaps, silences and lingering traumas, the arts project vindicated a positive long-wide space for reconciling with painful pasts.³³ It was a similar dynamic for the children of refugees on different sides of the border, as exemplified by the actors, Javed and Sandeep, brought together across their conspicuous gendered, religious and regional differences. The two actors were able to form a bond of appreciation though transhistorical and transborder understanding, empathy and humour, a task that was easier to pursue in Britain than had their families stayed in their respective new countries on either side of the barbed borders of India and Pakistan.

'Anger is a Forest with no Path'³⁴

Partition was undeniably a gruesome event that left hardly anyone unaffected in the subcontinent: it created separations and divisions of all sorts, making it an inexorable fact of life in the region, and their repercussions travelled far and wide. Such memories were also taken abroad even if they were not always articulated in conversation or expressed in the literature. But amongst the lingering pain and bitterness, these were also points for new beginnings and creations. In the process of remembering the period, we have considered

archival fragments from below in the form of photography and threadbare recollections. We have looked at the power of intersensory imagery to resonate on different planes once embedded in semiotically rich contexts about partition. We then tried to compile the skipping strands for the chrysalis of an intersensory archive that encompassed objects, photographs, architecture, digital platforms along with the remembered, embodied, narrativised, re-enacted and imagined.

Although I had a personal investment in this research in that my paternal aunt's in-law's were forced to move in 1947 from Lahore, my overriding aim in engaging with partition stories were to tend to the blinkers of communalised, masculinised, and homogenised histories, whether they be through the determining lens of nation-state or the drift of diaspora. Apart from the desire to create an engaging and sensitive piece of creative work, I felt that it was necessary to work against right wing and fundamentalist co-option of histories on all sides; to redress views of women as silenced subjects of patriarchal narratives; and to highlight the importance of diverse cultures, heritage, and education. As one research contributor put it: 'These are stories of pain. But we need these as well. Very much so'. Another audience member stated:

The play makes me want to research more about the partition. (I'm not Asian myself). I had no idea the line was drawn by some random man not in situ. I wish children were taught about this in school.

A triple A of associations - academic-artist-activist - motivated me to develop the play, leading to the generation of new ideas, perspectives and material that could act against reductive views of multiple migrant realities. Such reminders are even more essential at a

time where educational curricula focus primarily on myopic nationalist interests, and populist politics thrive on strongman politics and the bulwarking of borders across the world. As Shobha Rao notes in one of her stories based in the Rajasthani desert: ‘In Jaisalmer, they’d said, Go, they’ve made a new country for you. But all I can see is sand. And the only borders I know are the ones between our hearts’.³⁵ It is such cardiac blocks that need to be excised before the political ones can be fruitfully redressed.

¹ *Silent Sisters* was written by Raminder Kaur, directed by Mukul Ahmed and produced by Sohaya Visions and Mukul and Ghetto Tigers. It was first performed in Crawley Hawth Theatre and the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts in Brighton in October 2016. The production was supported by the Arts Council of England, the University of Sussex Asia Centre, the Brady Arts Centre, Rich Mix and Sussex Asian communities. My sincere thanks to all those who contributed to the research and development of the drama.

² Bagchi Jasodhara and Subhoranjan Dasgupta *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* (Stree, Calcutta, 2005).

³ On the potentials and limitations of oral histories, see R J Grele, ‘Oral History Interviewing: The Good Interview’, Director Emeritus of the Oral History Research Office (Columbia University, 2014). http://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/locations/ohro/The_Good_Interview_Grele.pdf; Alice M Hoffman, ‘Reliability and Validity in Oral History’, *Today’s Speech*, 1974, Vol 22, no 1, pp 23-27; Mark Cave and Stephen M Sloan eds, *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, Oxford Oral History Series, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014.

⁴ On the impact of turbulent events in the subcontinent on the diaspora, see Raminder Kaur, 'Dramas of Diaspora', *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol 7, no 2, 2000, pp 343-364.

⁵ See Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook, *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*. Routledge, London, 2014.

⁶ Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain*, Pluto Press, London, 2002; M H Fisher, 2004. *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlement in Britain, 1600–1857*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2004; Raminder Kaur, '“Ancient Cosmopolitanism” and the South Asian Diaspora', *South Asian Diaspora*, Vol 3, No 2, September 2011, 197–213;

⁷ Parminder Bhachu, *Twice Migrants*, Law Book Co of Australasia, Bel Air, 1985. Christopher McDowell, *A Tamil Asylum Diaspora: Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement and Politics in Switzerland (Forced Migration)*, Berghahn Books, Oxford, 1996.

⁸ Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries. Women in India's Partition*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2007, p xi.

⁹ See Raminder Kaur, 'At the Ragged Edges of Time: The Legend of Tilak and the Normalisation of Histories', *South Asia Research*, 2004, Vol 24, no 2, pp 185-202.

¹⁰ Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge (1995) 'Public Modernity in India', *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, Carol A Breckenridge ed (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1995) p 12.

¹¹ Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, op cit, p 8.

¹² Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, C Hurst and Co Publishers, London, 2000, p 21.

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/SilentSisterstheplay/> Accessed 12/01/2017

¹⁴ Ibid, p 197.

¹⁵ See Heidi J Larson, 'Photography that Listens', *Visual Anthropology*, Vol 1, no 4, 1988, pp 415-432.

¹⁶ Some of the more fortunate elites travelled in a biplane and managed to carry some belongings across. One Hindu man who migrated from New Delhi to Britain was eternally grateful to a Muslim labourer who worked in his parent's flour factory in Lahore:

All of a sudden it [partition riots] erupted and this Muslim worker helped them when it erupted...His name is Amin. That's all I know. And because of Amin, my father took a *tonga* [a horse and carriage] and they hid in the *tonga*. People looked but they hid behind some blankets and things, as he said he was taking some goods. And they managed to get to the airport. They had money. I think it cost them one lakh (10,000 rupees) which is a lot of money in those days for a flight. Only two or three people could get into a flight. So they took two flights over to the India side and that's how they survived. Thankfully Amin took them through the riots.

¹⁷ See Franz Fanon (2004) *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press. <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/01/14/tryst-with-destiny-remapping-the-promised-lands-with-the-study-of-margaret-bourke-whites-photographic-essay/> Accessed 12/01/2017

¹⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1977, p 14.

¹⁹ <http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/plumage/weaving-contours-arpana-caur/> Accessed 12/01/2017

²⁰ <https://www.sohayavisions.com/our-story> Accessed 12/01/2017

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/pg/SilentSisterstheplay/posts/> Accessed 12/01/2017

²² From her oral histories, Butalia also notes the unusual ferocity of the rains that year, *The Other Side of Silence*, op cit, pp 77.

²³ Ibid, p 105.

²⁴ Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, op cit.

²⁵ See Navtej K Purewal, and Virinder S Kalra 'Women's "Popular" Practices as Critique: Vernacular Religion in Indian and Pakistani Punjab.' *Women's Studies International Forum*, 2010, Vol 33, No 4 pp 383-389.

²⁶ Ibid. p xii

²⁷ http://makansharief-rattarchattar.blogspot.co.uk/2011/03/history-why-mela-is-celebrated-mela_28.html Accessed 12/01/2017

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https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=rattar+chattar+gurdaspur&biw=1242&bih=557&tbm=isch&source=lnms&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj0I3Shb3RAhXEI8AKHXCvBccQ_AUIBygC#tbm=isch&q=rattar+chattar+gurdaspur+creative+commons&imgsrc=90L1BcoFjbhE-M%3A
Accessed 12/01/2017

²⁹ Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, op cit; Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*, op cit; Veena Das, 'National Honour and Practical Kinship: Unwanted Women and Children'. In Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp eds *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*, University of California Press, California, 1995.

³⁰ Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, op cit, p 18.

³¹ Shobha Rao, *An Unrestored Woman*, op cit, p 121.

³² Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993.

³³ See Iftikhar Dadi and Hammad Nasar, *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space*, Herbert F Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca, 2012.

³⁴ Shobha Rao, *An Unrestored Woman*, op cit, p 194.

³⁵ Ibid, pp 180-1.